

EXHIBIT 54

After a Year of Protests, Portland Is Ready to Move On. But Where?

The demonstrations that swept the country after George Floyd's death lived on for much of the year in Portland, a city now engaged in finger-pointing and a debate over what comes next.

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PORTLAND, Ore. — Defund the police? City leaders in Portland tried it. A unit in the fire and rescue bureau, one of the first of its kind in a major city, began this year taking some 911 calls about people in crisis, especially those who are homeless.

Instead of police officers with flashing lights and guns, a paramedic and a social worker would drive up offering water, a high-protein snack and, always and especially, conversation, aiming to defuse a situation that could otherwise lead to confrontation and violence. No power to arrest. No coercion.

“Having someone show up and offer you goods rather than run you off is different, and people respond to it — it softens the mood,” said Tremaine Clayton, a burly, tattooed veteran of 20 years at the fire and rescue bureau who helps run the program.

But this spring, just as the project was preparing for a major rollout into more neighborhoods, there was another plot twist: The new policing alternative was itself mostly defunded. The city decided on a go-slow approach, and the promised \$4.8 million expansion evaporated.

Portland, the Oregon city of bridges, bike lanes and left-leaning idealists — beloved, abhorred and caricatured in just about equal measure — is wrestling mightily with the question of what it means to make a city safe and, as it gradually opens up from the Covid-19 shutdowns, to feel safe, too. It is an issue that many American cities are addressing as the economic and societal disruptions of the past year linger and resonate.

Violent crime, especially homicide, has spiked in most urban areas during the pandemic, and many police departments are facing new scrutiny about training and bias since the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis a year ago.

But here in the nation's 25th-largest metropolitan area, with about 2.5 million people, there is an additional factor that ripples through every public policy choice, and that even the city's top prosecutor said has to a degree warped the debate about what to do to rebuild a city that Portlanders want and love.



Tremaine Clayton helps run an alternative policing program in Portland that aims to defuse situations that could otherwise lead to confrontation and violence. Mason Trinca for The New York Times

A hardened core of street activists, many of them professing opposition to authority in general, has dug in and shows no signs of going away. (Portland's mayor, Ted Wheeler, has asked people to stop calling them protesters, but rather what they call themselves: anarchists.) Their numbers are now down to perhaps 25 to 75 on any given night, compared with hundreds in late 2020 and the many thousands who marched last summer in protests after Mr. Floyd's murder.

But they have shown themselves at times to be violent — one was charged with attempted murder after a Molotov cocktail was thrown at the police — destructive of property and highly adaptable, using social media tools and other strategies to divert the police from the targets they select.

Direct actions are promoted on social media with the phrase “No gods, no masters,” a 19th-century anarchist term that indicates a rejection of all forms of authority. More traditional protesters from Black Lives Matter and other movements who try to curtail violence are now ridiculed as “peace police” by the anarchists, who mostly consist of young, white men.

Demetria Hester, a member of Moms United for Black Lives, continues to push for defunding the police but disagrees with the current call for dismantling the entire political system. “Breaking windows is performative,” she said. “That satisfies them at night, but they don't have a plan.”

Some prominent Black leaders have been formally distancing themselves, with some calling the anarchists' rejection of gradual progress just another symbol of privilege that Black people do not have.

“Being able to protest every night is a white privilege, being able to yell at a police's face is a white privilege,” said Gregory McKelvey, a prominent Black organizer who ran the mayoral campaign last year for Mr. Wheeler's opponent, Sarah Iannarone. “Most Black people across the country do everything they can to avoid cops.”

Still, Mr. McKelvey has empathy for those who feel that taking to the streets is their only outlet. “These are people who have felt like they’ve had no agency or power in their life or in the political system,” he said. “They want to feel powerful, and when you can have the mayor talking about you every single day, and hundreds of police officers show up to fight you every day, you feel more powerful than when you’re sitting at home.”



A hardened core of street activists, many of them professing opposition to authority in general, has dug in and shows no signs of going away. Alisha Jucevic for The New York Times

The protests have led to vicious finger-pointing over who was to blame for the serial destruction that has left so many downtown storefronts shattered and covered with plywood.

Mayor Wheeler, heeding the demands of downtown residents and business owners, said the protesters themselves must be held accountable for their destructive attacks.

Protesters say the police have escalated the situation; this year, the Justice Department said that the city’s Police Bureau was violating its own use-of-force policies during crowd-control operations, and that supervisors were not properly investigating complaints.

Not so fast, the city shot back. The problem was at least partly created when former President Donald J. Trump sent in federal agents last summer, escalating the violence, the city attorney, Robert Taylor, said in a vehement response.

One former Portland Police commander, Martin Rowley, who retired in 2007 but oversaw the policing of protests in the 1990s and early 2000s, said he saw things turn from bad to worse over the past year as a result of frustration, rage and fatigue.

“You had officers who had been exposed to this environment over and over and over and over and over again, day after day after day, couldn’t get rotated out. Had days off canceled, had vacations canceled,” he said. At the same time, he said, protests evolved from peaceful marches to confrontational direct actions. “One-on-one confrontations escalates the use of force,” he said.

The Portland Police Bureau declined repeated requests for comment.

Perhaps the most stark outcome of the anarchist entrenchment has been a rift between the police and the Multnomah County district attorney, Mike Schmidt. Elected last year in the middle of the crisis, Mr. Schmidt immediately announced that he would focus on prosecuting cases of violence or vandalism; protesters who simply resisted arrest or refused to disperse after a police order would not necessarily be charged. The police continued to make arrests for those lesser offenses, and Mr. Schmidt kept dismissing them.

At a meeting he had with the bureau’s riot squad late last year, Mr. Schmidt said, the officers did not hold back.

“They were like, ‘Why are you doing this? Your policy is putting my life in danger,’” he recounted. “‘You’ve emboldened the protesters by giving them this free pass that they can do whatever they want to us.’”

Mr. Schmidt said he was struck by how the police seemed to view his prosecution policy from an us-versus-them perspective. “It was like, ‘There’s our team and there’s their team, and you are on their team and you’re not on our team. And we’ve never had a D.A. not be on our team before,’” he said.

Mike Schmidt, the Multnomah County district attorney, has dismissed cases against protesters who resisted arrest or refused to disperse after a police order. Nathan Howard/Getty Images

As the George Floyd protests waned elsewhere in the country, demonstrations in Portland continued almost nightly, for months on end. Video clips of burning trash barrels, broken windows and police in riot gear populated YouTube.

“You see images that make it seem like ‘Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome,’” said Phillip Atiba Goff, a professor of African American studies and psychology at Yale University who co-founded the Center for Policing Equity, an advocacy group that works to reduce bias in policing.

The rise in gun violence in the city — there were 891 shootings in 2020, more than double the number the previous year — has created what Dr. Goff calls a “correlation fallacy,” that protest equates to rising violent crime. Many big cities have seen a recent spike in violent crime, with little direct connection to street protests or law enforcement philosophy, he said.

“Portland is a dangerous potential distraction,” he said. “If you look at where progressive prosecutors were elected, homicide jumped; if you look at where they were defeated, homicide also spiked.”

But even as Portland’s streets shook with anger, they were also filled, more and more, by the victims of disruption in the city’s fabric — people without a place to live, rendered homeless by social and economic dislocations of the pandemic. The spiraling problem is obvious throughout the city’s downtown, which is sprinkled with sidewalk encampments of tents.

The rising numbers of homeless people turned the new fire and rescue unit, called Portland Street Response, into a leading front in the effort to quell the crisis. Like several similar programs that have recently started or are in planning in Denver, Rochester, N.Y., Oakland, Calif., and San Francisco, the effort is modeled after a project begun in Eugene, Ore., in 1989.

Portland’s new team, as well as the city’s 911 dispatchers, had to learn as they went. What calls were too dangerous, and therefore would still require a police response? Some were obvious — a person wielding a firearm warranted an officer on the scene. In more uncertain circumstances, dispatchers developed a series of triage questions to the 911 caller: Is a weapon present? Can it be seen?

Supplies donated to the alternative policing program. The City Council last month backed the mayor’s plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot effort before deciding whether to expand the program. Mason Trinca for The New York Times

“The dispatchers are learning it as they go,” said Britt Urban, a clinical social worker on the response team.

City leaders had initially planned a major expansion of the program, but after vigorous debate the City Council last month backed the mayor’s plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot effort before expanding it. “I have one priority, and only one — that’s outcomes,” Mr. Wheeler told the council.

Many people here say that the battle over what kind of city Portland will be, what values it will represent, what lessons it will draw from a tumultuous year, is now coming down to the question of fatigue — on the part of the police, city leaders, business owners and downtown residents. After 2020, the old status quo has started sounding pretty good.

But many, especially in the Black community, are warning that an ache for normalcy must be resisted; Portland, they say, cannot just bandage over the wound that cries out the loudest in its pain and anger.

“We can’t yet see where it’s going to end up, but whatever it is, we can’t allow things to go back,” said Taji Chesimet, 19, a college student and co-chair of the Portland Committee on Community-Engaged Policing, which reports to Mr. Wheeler.

Mr. Chesimet, who grew up in the city, said he thought Portland would ultimately be not just the city that showed the world what happened when streets explode in violence, but how a city could change.

“We can be the model,” he said.